Look back in dismay

The World Microcomputer Chess Championship held recently in Glasgow was full of surprises, as Tony Harrington found out.

Looking back with hindsight at the predictions I made about the likely outcome of the 4th World Microcomputer Chess Championship (WMCC), I find many reasons for dropping the prediction-making habit as quickly as possible (see October PCW). This World Championship was full of surprises.

The first of these concerned those who weren't there at the off. The Novag Super Constellation was many people's idea of a hot favourite prior to the event. It had beaten all kinds of international masters at blitz chess and had acquired a great reputation in the process. Surely Novag would want to cash in on its potential and claim a WMCC title. But no, instead of an entry form, Novag sent round a circular to everyone except the organisers a week or two before the tournament, stating why these kinds of events are not worth mentioning.

In golf that would be called playing the percentage shot: if you have a good reputation already, why risk blowing it? However, that wasn't one of Novag's reasons for not entering. It was worried about the absence of any reliable test to differentiate between a genuine 'commercial entry' and something running on equipment way out of reach of most people's pockets. That sounds a reasonable grumble, but it has more to do with marketing nerves than reality. I still think the Super Constellation might have won if it had been allowed a chance (another prediction, but habits are hard to break).

SciSys was a less surprising absence. Nothing had been said before the tournament about a real improvement in the SciSys Superstar program. The word from SciSys was that it was working on one but that it would not be ready in time for the event.

Even with these two manufacturers out of the running, the field was one of the largest ever with nineteen entries beginning and — even more remarkably — finishing the tournament (despite the occasional threat of a walk out, a normal occurrence at these events).

Far away was the most astonishing thing about the tournament, from my point of view, was the reappearance of Conchess, which had three entries. Ulf Rathman, the programmer, had been quietly beavering away since Conchess's rather undistinguished initial public performance at the 1982 PCW tournament, and had come up with a program capable of testing the best. That there was the Mephisto team, also with three entries. Mephisto had drawn some flak over the last year for releasing a Mephisto III which had the unfortunate habit of losing to the earlier Mephisto II. (New releases are supposed to be better than the old, rather than just different.) So it was nice to see that Hegener and Glazer, the supplier, appeared to have some improvements to offer.

Fidelity, as usual, had a strong array of entries, supplemented by a number of Spracklen programs running on business computers like the Compaq, the Macintosh and the Apple. Intelligent Software entered an experimental program and — good news for home computer owners — Richard Lang and Martin Bryant, two regular participants in what used to be the annual PCW European Tournaments, also had entries.

Lang's Cyrus program, available in one form or another on both the Spectrum and the Dragon, was replaced for this event by a new generation program designed for the Sinclair QL. Sponsored by Psion, which will be marketing it in the UK, Lang's program (called Psion after the sponsor, undoubtedly a wise decision) ran for the purposes of the tournament, on an 8MHz Sage computer. It will, he reckons, be slower by a factor of three on the QL, but even so, it looks like being one of the strongest home computer programs around. Lang won joint first prize in a four-way tie for first place. This earned him a large bottle of Lang's Whisky (though he assures us he is not related).

Bryant's home computer program for the BBC Model B, White Knight Mk 10, won the 'Best home computer chess program' section at the 1983 PCW tournament. Bryant improved on White Knight with a program called Colossus, which has done very well as a commercial program for the Commodore 64 (see November PCW). For this event, he entered a souped-up version of Colossus, running on an Apple II.

Last but not least, there was the solitary amateur entry, Geoff Bulmer's 'Chessnut', a plucky little program running on a Commodore 64 and guaranteed of the best amateur trophy even if it didn't win a game (it didn't).

The seven-round Swiss tournament was held in Glasgow at the Stakis Ingrim Hotel (9 to 15 September) as part of the centenary celebrations of the Scottish Chess Association. Sponsored by CGL Ltd and Lang's Supreme Whisky, in association with Stakis Hotels PLC, my main concern is that unless the Scots feel like an early celebration, we might have to wait another hundred years for a micro tournament to be as well organised and presented.

From the opening ceremony to the grand buffet close, it was a splendidly organised and run event.

Rounds began at 2pm each day and went through to a theoretical 10pm close. I say theoretical because the tournament director, Mike Valvo, a US International Master, made a practice of allowing play to go on where necessary until the computers either bored their programmers to death or reached a result. If there was the smallest sign of theoretical interest left in the game, he was willing to pace the floor and let the machines fight it out. Even when the programmers themselves wanted to
programs at 12MHz on a 68000 and
Princess(p) Conchess) at 6.1MHz on a
6502chip. Full tournament bulletins are
available from Chess Suppliers (Scot-
land) Ltd, 15 Hope St, Glasgow G2.

Games section
White: Fidelity Elite X. Black: Mephisto
B. Notes by Grandmaster Dr John Nunn
(The 4th World Microcomputer Chess
Championship was notable for the
close finish and for the surprising
number of interesting end games aris-
ing. The reason for this is probably that
the struggle between the stronger
programs created today is likely to
remain finely balanced for a long time.
The following fascinating ending was
of some sporting interest since the
Fidelity Elite X needed to win against
Mephisto B to tie for first. We take up
the story with the Elite, as White, about
to make its 43rd move.)

![Chess board image]

43 Rb1-a1!
(Although material is level, White has
tall the chances because the passed
a-pawn can be used to deflect Black's
pieces from the defence of his kingside
pawns. White correctly places his rook
behind the pawn to support its ad-
vance.)

43 ... Ke7-d6
(Black later decides to blockade the
pawn with his rook in any case, so it
would have been better to do this
immediately by 43 ... Re2-e6 44 a4-a5
Ra6-a6.)

44 a5-a6 Re6-e8
(Black would have preferred to
use his king to obstruct the pawn's advance
by 45 ... Kg7-b7 46 e5-a7 + Kg8-b8, so as
to leave the rook actively placed, but
White can play 45 ... Ra1-b1 followed by
Ra1-b7 attacking the kingside pawns.)

46 Ra1-b1?
(Giving White unnecessary chances.
46 a5-a7 Re8-a8 47 Kg1-f2 Kc7-b7 48
Kf2-f3 Ra8-a7 49 Ra1-a7 + Kb7-a7 50
Kf5-f4 Kf7-b6 51 Kf4-a5 Kf6-c7 52
Kf5-f6 followed by Ke6-f7 wins the
kingside pawns. We shall meet several
lines in which the rooks are exchanged,
when the result depends on whether
White's king can penetrate to attack
the g7 and h7 pawns before Black's king
comes to the rescue. Here the result is
as close as it could be, depending on a
single move.)

46 ... Re8-b8
(46 ... g7-g6 47 Rh1-b7 + Kg7-c6 48
Rb7xh7 Ra8-e1 + 49 Kg1-f2 Re1-a1 was
no better because of the strong reply 50
Rf1-h1.)

47 Rh1-e1?
(Missing 47 Rh1xb8 Kg7xb8 48 Kg1-f2
winning as before.)

47 ... Kg7-d6

48 a6-a7 Rb8-a8
(White revert to the correct plan.
Black's rook is completely immobilised,
so White has time to bring up his king.)

49 ... g7-g6
50 h2-h3 Kg6-e7
51 g2-g4?
(This should have thrown away the
win, which could have been forced by
the familiar plan of 51 Kg1-f2 followed
by a king advance.)

52 ... f5xg4
53 h3xg4 Kc7-b7

54 a7-a6+ Kg7-c8
(Black could also have taken the
pawn, but he has not spilt anything
yet.)

55 Ra1-a1 Ke6-b6
56 Ra1-b1+ Kg7xa7
57 Kg1-f2
(White is in no danger of losing
despite his minus pawn, since Black's
king is too far away, but equally he
should not win.)

56 ... Ra8-f8+
57 Kg2-g3 Rf8-f7
58 g4-g5 Rf7-f6
59 Kg3-g4 Kg7-a6
60 Rb1-d1 Rf7-h7
61 Rd1-b1 Rf7-b7??

(Mephisto's blunder allows the Elite
X to take joint first place. Black only
really needed to mark time by 61 ... Ke6-a7
to draw, since White cannot undertake
anything positive.)

62 Rb1xb7 Kxa6xb7
(White's king is able to win both
Black pawns and reach a won position
with king and pawn vs king.)

63 Kg4-f4 Kg6-c6
64 Kg4-e5 Kg6-c5
65 Kg4-f5 Kg6-d4

(Or 61 ... Kg5-c6 Kg6-g7 Kg6-e7 62
Kg7-f7 63 Kg7xh7 Kg6-f7 Kg6-f7 64
Kg6xg6 Kg7-f8 70 Kg6-f8 Kg6-f8
71 Kg5-g6 Kg8-f8 72 Kg6-g7 Kg8-c7 73 Kg7-f7
and the pawn promotes to a queen.)

66 Kg7-f7 Kg6-g7
67 Kg7-f7 Kg6-f7
68 Kg7-h8 Kg6-f8

(Black has no choice but to abandon
his last pawn to its fate.)

69 Kg6xg6 Ke6-e5
70 Kg6-f7 Ke6-d5
71 Kg5-g6 Kg5-e6
72 Kg6-g7

(and Black resigned.)